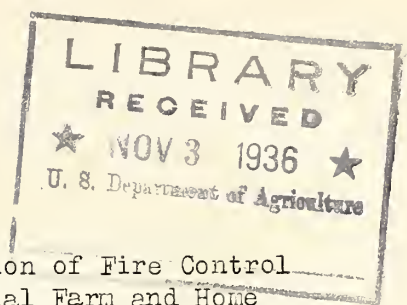


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## GOOD FIRE HABITS

Radio Address by David P. Goodwin of the Division of Fire Control and Improvements, United States Forest Service, National Farm and Home Hour, October 9, 1936.

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A Forest Ranger has perhaps a slight edge on a City Fire Chief. When he is directing an attack on a vicious forest fire and his crew swings its axes like Lou Gehrig poling for a home run or squirts water around as long as the pressure lasts, he won't be criticized for ruining the property he is hired to protect.

Well that's one thing the Forest Ranger doesn't have to bother about - one of the few things. His job, like that of the City Fire Chief, is to protect valuable property from swift destruction and, in far too many instances, human life.

People who live in cities and towns and in the open plains regions can scarcely visualize the vast extent of the forested areas of this nation. Picture in your mind the map of the United States. About one-third of this great area between the two oceans is forested and, when conditions are right, can burn. Of this great timber-covered area two-fifths is included within the protective boundaries of the 153 National Forests administered by the United States Forest Service. Each National Forest is under the control of a Forest Supervisor who has a corps of Forest Rangers whose activities during the fire season are centered mainly upon the ever pressing problem of fire control.

What is a fire season? Forests are outdoor, natural things, and sensitive to every change in weather. This year, as in the other great drought year of 1934, the same weather factors that brought shrivelling destruction to the farm lands of the Great Plains areas carried fire with gun powder flash through the western forests. Deficient rainfall, high temperatures, high winds: those same three deadly blights - working in perfect rhythm.

In the Southern and Eastern sections of the country there are two fire seasons: one in the fall after the mass of fallen leaves form a dry litter, and the other in the spring before the new fresh foliage arrives. In the West where most of the forests are evergreen and the long dry spell sets in, the danger period lasts from June to October.

Long in advance of the fire season the Forest Officers are busy with intensive planning: strengthening and tuning up the control organization in the light of last season's experience. Lookout towers are added; the radio system and the network of telephone lines are repaired and extended; the location and routes of mounted patrolmen are studied and improved; tools, water-throwing apparatus, trucks, tractors, and all equipment are put in perfect condition and made available for instant use.

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When a fire is reported the system begins to click and the fire fighting forces go into action by truck, auto, horseback or on foot, and here lately, even by airplane. Their job is to corral the fire before the next morning's wind and sun get in their inflammatory licks.

Let's take a case at close range. It's mid-August. You are in Northern Idaho touring with your family. Attracted by a sign you turn up a side road through magnificent timber and finally, way up ahead through the trees, you glimpse a tall steel tower on the summit. Up it you climb and find a keen eyed young man gazing around. Just looking. Well maybe you think he is just looking. He chats along with you about the marvelous view, but you sense a certain alert tenseness.

Suddenly he jumps into action, swings that large instrument into line, sights through it, grabs a telephone. Perhaps you haven't noticed, but to the northeast his trained eye has picked up a tiny plume of white smoke way away. He's got his connection. "Hello Mack, fire 27 degrees about 4 miles. Vertical angle 3 1/2 degrees down. Just started. Seems to be about a quarter of a mile down from the top of the ridge in open timber in the head of Rattlesnake Creek. OK I'll keep you posted."

That's about all you'll hear there. "Mack," the Dispatcher down at the District Ranger's headquarters, is already plotting that direction line on his map. Hardly has he done that when a Lookout from another peak phones in with a cross reading. Across the Dispatcher's map the two lines coincide at an angle. "Mack" now knows just where that fire is and from his forest fuel map he knows what kind of inflammable material it is burning in and from his hourly forest weather reports he knows about what that fire is going to do in the next hour or so. Putting all these facts together he's made up his mind how many fire fighters will be required and how he's going to get them there. He doesn't waste time; he's on the phone again.

In a short time he has contacted the various units prepared for fire suppression, which because of location or strength are estimated sufficient to get that fire. And they are on their way. These include organized crews under trained leaders employed specifically for fire duty, and, in most cases, CCC boys from camps in the vicinity. These young fellows by the way, have hung up an enviable record in fighting forest fires.

I want to make it clear that unfavorable weather conditions only, accelerate the spread of fire, -- they do not start fires.

What, then, does start forest fires? Why do they occur by tens of thousands every year, causing untold losses and suffering, and requiring vast expenditures of effort and money? Since lightning causes only 7% of the forest fires of the United States, "who" starts them, instead of "what" starts them, is a more pertinent question. The important fact and the one which is the direct responsibility of every citizen is that human carelessness and human intent cause 75% of our country's forest fires! That 75% means about 100,000 forest fires annually. It is hard for most people to believe that a good portion of these are set with definite intent -- incendiary fires if you will. Fires set with the purpose of securing some fancied benefit or, in many cases, maliciously.

But the greatest portion of this "calamitous hundred thousand" is caused by carelessness of those who live in the forests, as well as those who visit for recreation - even those just passing through. In most cases, it is a matter of pure, vacant thoughtlessness. Too late comes the plea, "I didn't know the gun was loaded."

Well - why should you care? The answer is that your job, your income and the jobs and incomes of your friends will be affected by what you and your friends do about forest fires.

The pleasure and the recreation you and your friends get from the woods depends on keeping the timber lands green. Fires have made deserts of productive lands; have been the cause of ghost towns; have reduced to dire poverty the people left stranded when industries have moved on after the first timber is gone and the growing crop burned up.

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A few minutes of fire prevention in the woods is worth hours of fire fighting. You may think that habits of carelessness are too deeply fixed in American culture. But if every person who cares about the woods would systematically drill himself in habits of care and urge others to do the same, losses from man-caused fires would drop to almost nothing.

Take this personally, you who listened. If you go to the hills for any reason develop in yourself the pride of good woodsmanship that breeds skill in the careful use of fire. Make sure that a fire spotted next summer by the lone lookout did not start from your match or cigarette. Cultivate good fire habits!

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